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ABSTRACT

Four California educators consider whether foreign language study will disappear from the curriculum. Suggesting that their topic is one that vitally concerns the nation's interests, the participants summarize their opinions in this report. Margaret A. Collin believes that California's removal of the mandated elementary foreign language requirement will force the discipline from the scene. She questions the value of producing a generation of students with foreign language experience who continue to retain a latent negative attitude toward foreign language instruction. In contrast, Gerhard Friedrich, in discussing foreign language provisions in the California state colleges, declares that foreign languages may not be out, but the study "is in a crucial period of reassessment of purposes and means and requires a clear, compassionate reexamination." Elinor H. Nathan reviews FLES programs in the schools of Beverly Hills, suggesting that innovations in teaching are now necessary; Vern W. Robinson optimistically predicts that abolition of the requirements will produce highly motivated students and increased enrollments. (DS)

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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

of the

GENERAL SESSION OF THE RESEARCH COUNCIL,

MODERN AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, INC.

FALL CONFERENCE, NOVEMBER 1, 1969

ARE FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON THEIR WAY OUT?

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Panel Discussants:

Mrs. Margaret Collin, Administrator,
Torrance Unified School District
Dr. Gerhard Friedrich, Dean of Academic Planning,
California State Colleges
Mrs. Elinor Nathan, President of the Board of Education,
Beverly Hills Unified School District
Dr. Vern W. Robinson, Director, Office of Relations With Schools,
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ARE FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON THEIR WAY OUT?

INTRODUCTION

Jack W. Rhodes

We are witnessing great changes in foreign language education. We have seen our state government become the first in the nation to require foreign language study as a part of general education for all children in grades 6, 7, and 8. Then, with only three years of experience in the program, we have seen that legislative mandate abruptly removed. Furthermore, we hear that colleges are moving to drop their foreign language requirements. What does the future hold for us?

Before attempting to answer that question, let us review briefly some of the turning points in the history of foreign language education in the United States. Our colonial grammar schools, following the lead of the Boston Latin Grammar School in 1635, continued the classical tradition of European schools by devoting most of their course of study to Latin and Greek. Modern languages were introduced in Benjamin Franklin's Academy in Philadelphia before the Revolutionary War.

The first official survey of enrollment in foreign languages was made by the U. S. Office of Education in 1890. At that time, about 51% of the total high school enrollment was engaged in foreign language study at the ratio of about two students in Latin for each student in a modern language. The high point of enrollment in foreign languages was reached in 1910 when the combined totals for Latin and modern languages came to 83% of the students in public high schools. In 1922 the figure was back to 55 per cent and from then on it declined to reach its low point of 21 per cent in 1955. From this point of near collapse, enrollments started to rise again, but the future course is uncertain.

Are foreign languages on the way out? Four prominent educators were invited to participate in a panel discussion of this question and to share their insights with us. Presentations were made by an administrator in a unified school district, the president of a board of education, and representatives of the California State Colleges and the University of California. We are most appreciative of their willingness to participate in this consideration of a topic that vitally concerns every foreign language teacher. Summaries of their presentations appear, with their permission, on the following pages.

ARE FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON THE WAY OUT?

Margaret Collin

Yes, there is no doubt in my mind! This strong possibility is becoming more of a reality each year. The State of California removed the mandated elementary foreign language requirement last year. The passage of Senate Bill One has not strengthened instruction at grades seven and eight but has merely given "lip service" to the establishment at that level of some kind of foreign language course. The interpretation of "course" is nebulous and is open to various interpretations depending upon the attitude of the principals involved. This year has seen several colleges and universities removing the foreign language entrance requirement for entering freshmen. It appears to be "high time" in light of the need for revelency in education in order to capture the attention of the "now" generation. It's about time we all see the writing on the wall! Where will it all end?

Part of the answer can be found, I think, in a discussion that took place recently in a Master's seminar class in Educational Administration at U. S. C. Candidates for the Master's degree in that class and prospective school administrators were asked if they thought that they might harbor negative attitudes toward foreign languages and their instruction. Over 75% of those present in that class readily admitted to negative attitudes toward foreign languages. Further discussion revealed that each of them had studied a foreign language for at least two years or more and that each of them considered their study to have been of no value and they admitted that they didn't speak a word of the language now--other than a few trite phrases. How do you suppose today's doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, and businessmen would respond to the same question? I venture to say that it would be the same. The response of those prospective principals is significant and has serious implications for every foreign language teacher here today as well as those throughout the country.

This brings me to the point of asking several questions. Of what value was it to mandate foreign language instruction in grades six through eight in 1963 and remove the mandatum five years later? Of what value is it to require foreign language instruction as a collegiate entrance requirement when students terminate their study of the language upon completion of the requirement and never use the language functionally outside of the classroom situation? Finally, of what value is it to the profession to produce a generation of people who have been through "the foreign language experience", and have retained a latent negative attitude to foreign language instruction? Why should the public--the taxpayers--pay for unobtainable results? Just because the university requires it? Under the recent mandation, teachers were legally and professionally required to provide foreign language instruction and to pick up the tab for developing their language abilities. What negative attitudes were developed by teachers who were required to teach Spanish in my district, and by district principals, students, and parents as well? Such an experience as I have cited did not aid the cause of foreign language instruction. We might ask also if the college entrance requirement has not created the same negativism on the part of today's professionals in their respective fields.

In order to combat the situation as we find it today, we, the foreign language professionals, must abandon our former passive status and renew ourselves to the task that lies ahead--not a path to irrational militancy for the mere purpose of verbalizing our cause to our colleagues, administrators, and the general public, but a constructive path leading to a reevaluation of the purposes and goals of foreign language instruction at all levels and rebuilding of the profession. Direction should and must come from your leaders; and, once new purposes and goals have been delineated, then each member should become actively involved in dissemination and working for their attainment. Unless the professional association originates and promulgates its programs and endeavors, then foreign language teaching will continue to decline. Unless the membership at large becomes involved and its leaders assume the leadership position that is needed, then others will do it, others who know little about the profession or who have their own personal axes to grind. Through positive, assertive, creative, and innovative leadership, the profession through its professional association can assume leadership that is in keeping with the 1970's.

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About the speaker:

Mrs. Margaret A. Collin is curriculum consultant for the Torrance Unified School District, Torrance, California.

Mrs. Collin started her career in education at Lake Arrowhead, California, where she taught all grade levels, one through twelve. She also served, while she was there, as teaching principal, principal, and superintendent.

She came to Torrance over twenty years ago, serving as a primary teacher, then vice-principal, principal, and then curriculum consultant.

Mrs. Collin is a member of the following organizations: California Elementary School Administrators Assn., Modern Language Association, International Reading Association, Pi Lambda Theta, Delta Kappa Gamma, and Zeta Tau Alpha.

She is an Honorary Life Member of the state and national P.T.A., is on the International Council of the Association for Childhood Education, and is listed in "Who's Who in Education."

WANTED: A NEW RELEVANCE / A NEW PROFESSIONALISM

Gerhard Friedrich

It is scarcely a secret, but rather a hard fact, that in the public schools and colleges of this state foreign languages are not an item of top priority. The extent of disenchantment with the traditional college-level role of foreign language study is further illustrated by the recent action of Stanford University in eliminating the foreign language requirement for graduation; by a series of articles on higher education in a prominent European weekly under the suggestive title "An End to Latin"; and by a Japanese poet's portrayal of the present student generation as stumbling bluely through the tedious function of foreign De-kli-na-tion. Neither the scholarly argument of direct access to original sources nor the genteel notion of becoming multi-lingual and thus cultured has much relevance in the California of 1969. Whatever serious loss this may imply is, however, coupled with what seems to me a basic gain, for this is emphatically an age of general international awareness and involvement and of a related demand for language specialists. Recognition of the changed realities and the changed needs may lead to significant changes in educational strategy, including greatly expanded study abroad programs, curricular ventures such as the world civilization approach promoted by Professor Arrowsmith with regard to Classical languages, and a distinct emphasis on the production of sophisticated professional experts, with a high degree of technical skill, resourcefulness, and flexibility.

Foreign Language Provisions in the California State Colleges

None of the eighteen California State Colleges has a foreign language entrance requirement or a foreign language requirement for graduation, and only ten include foreign language courses among general education/breadth requirement choices. Even where there is a foreign language co-requirement in particular degree major curricula, I suspect that two years of beginning and intermediate foreign language do seldom amount to so-called "proficiency" and are not necessarily academically and professionally meaningful. It is all the more regrettable that about half of our colleges are chary with regard to accepting nationally verified Advanced Placement transfer credit in foreign languages.

There is, at least in relative terms, a remarkable success story in the record of foreign language degree production in the State Colleges. In 1968 they awarded 727 bachelor's degrees in foreign languages, more than ten times the number of 1960, and 81 master's degrees, three times the number of 1965. Half of those undergraduate and graduate degrees were in Spanish. French and German, in that order, make up the bulk of the remainder. Next in descending order come bachelor's degrees granted at five colleges in Russian, and bachelor's degrees granted at a single college in Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and Latin. A substantial proportion of these degree majors become school and college teachers. There is besides a related but not spectacular spurt in comparative or world literature programs, as English curricula manifest the inadequacies of their traditional Anglo-Saxon narrowness.

These facts and observations may provide a framework of reference for your questions and concerns. In my judgment, foreign languages are certainly not on the way out, but they are in a very crucial period of reassessment of purposes and means and require clear, dispassionate reexamination.

About the Speaker:

Dr. Gerhard Friedrich is Dean of Academic Planning, The California State Colleges, 5670 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90036.

Dr. Friedrich was born in Graudenz, Germany and acquired United States citizenship.

He earned his B. A. at Guilford, 1942, summa cum laude; his M. A. at Haverford, 1947, and his Ph. D. at Minnesota, 1951.

Before his present assignment, Dr. Friedrich was Instructor in English, Pennsylvania State University, University of Minnesota, 1947-51; Associate Professor of English, Haverford College, 1951-58; Associate Professor of English, Professor, and Department Head, Cedar Crest College, 1958-61; Professor of English, Department Chairman, and Humanities Division Chairman, California State College, Fullerton, 1961-64; Chairman, Graduate Studies Committee.

Typical of his professional activities are his services in the following positions: Director, two national conferences on improvement of teaching, Haverford, 1956, 1957; Chairman, College Entrance Examination Board Advanced Placement Program, Literature and English Composition Committee, 1958; Director, National Council of Teachers of English, 1962-; President, English Council of the California State Colleges, 1962-64; President, California Council of Teachers of English, 1963-64; Member, National Survey of Undergraduate Programs in English Advisory Committee, 1964-; Member-at-Large, Commission on Higher Education, 1968-.

He has published a number of books and articles and is listed in Directory of American Scholars, Who's Who in the East, and Who's Who in the West.

ARE FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON THEIR WAY OUT?

Elinor Nathan

There couldn't have been a better week for me to be talking about community participation in foreign language. Just this past Tuesday evening, at our regular Board of Education meeting, we heard a report on our Foreign Language Parents' Opinionnaire.

Last spring, this opinionnaire--with particular emphasis on FLES--was mailed to all parents in our district. We have an enrollment of about 5400 students in our 4 elementary schools and the one high school, which means approximately 3500 families. We feel that a deep interest in FLES was evidenced by a return of 1262 opinionnaires, which represents about 37% of the parents. The returns were quite representative of all grade levels, K thru 12, and all languages proportionately.

In general, the report is highly complimentary to FLES. It was suggested at our meeting Tuesday by several board members, including myself, that perhaps the questions were rather leading. But, in defense of that, how do you really prepare a completely objective questionnaire? And can you really find the answers you're seeking by being completely objective?

It is difficult for me to be objective in my evaluation. I have always been supportive of our FLES program. Studying another language, our children are learning to communicate with another group of people. We cannot always measure results by testing, particularly in foreign languages, because there are so many intangibles. I feel it is more important than ever these days that we do have a humanistic approach to education.

I'd like to tell you a little about the history of FLES in Beverly Hills. I happened to have been P.T.A. Council President for 1957-58, the year of Sputnik, so of course, a very exciting one to be closely involved with the schools. One of the women serving as a vice-president was a very close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt had told her that there were several suburban school districts in the East, comparable to Beverly Hills, that were teaching foreign language in the elementary schools. So several of us approached the Superintendent, Mr. Mitchell, and suggested that possibly Beverly Hills could start teaching French or Spanish or both in our elementary schools. Mr. Mitchell felt it could not become a district project until more research was done on it, but he did offer a classroom at one of the schools for an after school class in French. The teacher was to be paid by the P.T.A. so we charged 50 cents a lesson, and found tremendous parent support. By the second year, the demand was such that another teacher had to be hired by the P.T.A. and another classroom was given. By the end of that year, it was decided that it would become a district program. So, we have had FLES in Beverly Hills for ten years--French and Spanish, taught in first thru eighth grade. Within the past two years, we have added Latin and German at the sixth grade level. And I think, from the community viewpoint, there has been favorable acceptance of the program for most of that time.

Perhaps the district was too optimistic when we first started it, and too unrealistic in projecting that our children would be bi-lingual in reading, writing, and speaking the language by the time they finished that 12 year sequence. Well, the rumbling started about two years ago when the P.T.A., along with the school district, sponsored a "Let's communicate" series, at different homes. The evening on "Curriculum" brought out all the FLES opponents. Some of the questions raised were: Why can't the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders have more than 30 minutes? Why can't they have more and better textbooks? What about homework? The difficulty of communicating with the traveling teachers bothered some of the parents, and then high school placement became threatening to the student who was starting to be concerned about his transcript for college. Some parents felt that even though the child had had FLES, he should be given a chance to start in a beginning class at high school, just for reenforcement, even for a few months, and not take a chance on having a C or D on his record. With 92% of our young people going on to college (and with colleges still interested in grades) we become very grade oriented at our high school. We have begun to offer a few courses on a pass-fail basis, and I hope we shall be offering more next year when we complete our change-over to flexible scheduling. But, you can see how important placement can become.

I realize that, invariably, the one who questions or complains is the parent of a child who is not really successful in his studies. This might be only a small percentage, but our concern is for all students.

Another event that happened two years ago was the passage of our tax override. This was the first time that Beverly Hills had ever voted on a tax override. So, there was a great deal of information passed out to our public concerning the cost of our total educational program. Not too many people had ever stopped to analyze the cost of the individual programs. Well, they saw some rather high figures for many things, including FLES, and there have been many questions raised. It becomes the Board's responsibility to justify the dollars spent, so we were very supportive of the Administration's setting up several workshop sessions and sending out the opinionnaire. From all the comments we had had recently, we were beginning to think that possibly the program shouldn't begin as early as the first grade. The results of the opinionnaire were compiled. The answer to the question: "At which grade level do you believe foreign language instruction should begin in Beverly Hills?" was as follows: Out of 1250 replies, 467 said "Kindergarten" and 616 said "first year after Kindergarten." We were really surprised. Another thought that came out of the workshop was that possibly the program should not be mandatory for all students. The answer to the question: "Which elementary children should receive foreign language instruction?" showed that 77% checked "required for all children"; 13%, "voluntary for all children"; 9%, "required for above average students, but voluntary for average and below"; and 1% checked "voluntary for above average students: no foreign language for average or below average."

So here we are now--really convinced that we have a FLES oriented community, but knowing that our product must be improved.

I think there were some good suggestions that came out of the discussion at our board meeting Tuesday: An orientation of FLES for parents; more parent conferences with FLES teachers; a workshop with a cross section of parents and teachers of FLES; interviews with FLES alumni; multi-age groupings for the children from the summer enrichment programs, Colegio and Lycée; summer remedial program, done with the cultural approach, patterned after Colegio and Lycée; and flexible scheduling at the elementary level. In other words, the climate is right for some innovations. Now is the time, and even though the colleges may be putting less emphasis on languages, we feel a mandate from our public to continue our program, but also to continue to improve it.

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About the Speaker:

Mrs. Elinor H. Nathan is president of the Board of Education, Beverly Hills Unified School District, Beverly Hills, California, and has served as a member of that body since 1963. She has represented the school district at National and State School Board Conferences, the American Association of School Administrators Conference, and the Cubberly Conference for School Board Members, Stanford University.

Mrs. Nathan was born in Duluth, Minnesota, earned her B. A. in English at the University of Wisconsin, and embarked on a career in theatre, radio, and dramatics. She has served as a leader in youth groups. Her civic activities include service on the executive boards of P. T. A., Firends of the Beverly Hills Public Library, and the Los Angeles Council of Jewish Women. She is chairman of the Beverly Hills--Acapulco Sister City Education Committee.

ARE LANGUAGES ON THE WAY OUT?

Vern W. Robinson

My answer to the question, "Are languages on the way out?" is an emphatic "No!" We do have evidence that there is an over-supply of teachers of a foreign language at a time when still more candidates will glut the market next year. It is also true that Stanford dropped its foreign language requirement for graduation and that bad examples are more infectious than good ones.

Within the eight undergraduate campuses of the University of California the evidence is a bit mixed. At UCLA all of the common languages showed small increases in enrollment in lower division courses this fall, but in view of the fact that we exceeded our enrollment limit by 3,200 students, the small increases do not add up to an absolute gain for study of a foreign language, maybe not even maintenance of the status quo.

There has been no change in the amount of foreign language required for admission, but that piddling amount, two years, is only a part of a measuring stick used to predict success in the University. Furthermore, the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools, the faculty policy-making body in admissions, is a bit uncomfortable with the present requirements and is looking for an alternate plan which might admit non-conformist students of high quality. Most proposals considered, and thus far rejected, have omitted foreign language as a required subject.

All eight undergraduate campuses have some kind of a graduation requirement in foreign language. There is considerable variation, however, in the nature of the requirement from campus to campus. At the moment, the Executive Committee of the College of Letters and Science, Berkeley, is deadlocked on the proposition that its requirement in foreign language should be abolished and the faculty itself is thought to be evenly divided on the issue. UCLA's faculty of the College of Letters and Science balloted last year on two propositions: A student-sponsored proposal of three courses in one foreign language, and a proposal by the Department of English that the requirement should be five courses in one language. Both propositions lost by narrow margins. But agitation by the Student Educational Policy Commission continues, supported by an unknown proportion of the faculty. Riverside will abolish its College of Letters and Science at the end of the year, and no one knows whether or not the three Colleges to succeed it will have a foreign language requirement. The three soft spots are Berkeley, UCLA and possibly UC Riverside; the other campuses have no moves underway to change foreign language requirements.

In spite of rather mixed evidence thus far, I think that foreign language teachers in the colleges should be prepared for the day when their enrollments will not be supported by college graduation requirements. I hope that they will then not ease up on expectations of the student in an attempt to preserve enrollment. It is my conviction that the student who freely chooses to study a foreign language has a right to leave those courses with a feeling of solid accomplishment, not with one that he has been tolerably well entertained in a Mickey Mouse course.

About the Speaker:

Dr. Vern W. Robinson is Director of the Office of Relations With Schools, University of California, Los Angeles, California 90024.

Landess, Indiana was the birthplace of Dr. Robinson who received his A.B. degree from DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana. After the University of Illinois conferred on him the M.A. degree in German in 1931, he studied on a fellowship at the University of Munich for one year. His doctorate in German was awarded by the University of Illinois in February, 1939.

Dr. Robinson was an instructor in German at Wesleyan University before becoming a member of the Department of Germanic Languages at UCLA. During World War II he served for 30 months in the Signal Corps, including 21 months in Europe. His present assignment as Director of the Office of Relations With Schools involves responsibilities for programs of that Office on eight campuses of the University of California.